

Worry over cop shortage

● THE Baroness of Basildon is worried that dozens of experienced police officers will be forced to retire.

To make budget cuts, three police forces – North Wales, Strathclyde and Surrey – will be making officers' with 30 years' in the job take compulsory retirement.

Police representatives have argued the move will see a wealth of experience lost.

Speaking in the House of Lords Labour peer and former Basildon MP Angela Smith voiced concerns over the plans.

Freebie for Blues fans

● SOUTHEND United fans can get a free ticket for Saturday's game with Accrington Stanley if they attend a meeting beforehand.

A convention for sports clubs in Southend will take place on the first floor foyer of the Civic Centre, in Victoria Avenue, from 10am until 2.30pm.

Club representatives will take part in workshops to help them promote their clubs.

For more information call 01702 318121.

Police look into burglary

● BURGLARS raided a house in Southend after the owners left a window unlocked.

Thieves took a television, electrical goods, cash and mobile phones from the house in Canterbury Avenue.

Anyone with information should call PC Jamie Willotts on 0300 3334444.

Thieves hit block of flats

● BURGLARS stole £1,600 of goods from a block of flats.

They got into the communal area of the building in Cotswold Road, Westcliff, through an unlocked door, then forced open the doors to the flats.

They stole cash, a laptop and a small hi-fi some time between 1pm on Sunday, October 31, and 9.45am the following day.

Anyone with information should call Det Con Carrieane Snell, of Southend CID, at Southend police station on 0300 3334444.

● A COFFEE roaster briefly caught alight at Utopia cafe, in Alexandra Street, Southend, at 8.55am on Saturday, but was out by the time firefighters arrived, just before 9am.

Bishops fear for evicted travellers

By JON AUSTIN

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RELIGIOUS leaders have united to voice concern over Basildon Council's plans to evict up to 96 traveller families from Crays Hill.

Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas McMahon, from Brentwood Diocese, and Church of England Bishop of Bradwell Laurie Green, have said they will be praying for the families on the illegal Dale Farm travellers site.

They expressed fears the eviction will break up a united community and will be a burden on the public purse.

Last month, the Echo revealed Essex Police and Basildon Council have made separate bids to the Government for funding to cover the operation, after it emerged policing costs could be as high as £10million if there is large-scale resistance.

Bishop Thomas said: "Alongside the humanitarian concerns, we have to ask if an extremely expensive operation to evict the travellers is a good use of public money in these straitened times."

The pair also toured Crays Hill Primary School, which it is feared may close following the eviction as nearly all of its pupils are from the site.

The bishops were impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm

□ Concern for families facing eviction

□ Clergy impressed with Crays Hill school

of staff at the school.

Bishop Thomas added: "We are particularly concerned that breaking up this long-standing community and its way of life will be a serious trauma for the children, who have stability and support at this excellent school."

"It is certainly a privilege in our ministry to support the traveller community and to work for more understanding on all sides."

"We really enjoyed the company of such lovely children and we will be keeping Crays Hill School, the children and their families, very much in our prayers."

Grattan Puxon, a campaigner for the site, welcomed the church's support.

He said lawyers were looking for grounds to challenge the court decision over housing.

“Breaking up this long-standing community and its way of life will be a serious trauma for the children

'Church should donate land'

BASILDON council leader Tony Ball said the church should do its bit by finding land it owns which could be turned into an alternative site for the travellers.

Mr Ball said: "I share the bishops' concern about the high cost to the public purse of an eviction."

"Perhaps it could use its influence to work with the travellers."

"The church is one of the biggest landowners in the country so perhaps it could identify some of its land which they could move to, provided planning permission was in place."

CAMPAIGNER'S DEATH MOURNED



■ Stalwart – John Flynn

THE bishops' pastoral visit to the site came as the families were mourning the death of an elderly and respected campaigner.

John Flynn, 77, had suffered several long-term illnesses.

The bishops prayed with his bereaved family during the visit.

Dale Farm families will be heading to Ireland to attend Mr Flynn's funeral.



■ Concern – Bishop of Brentwood, Thomas McMahon, with children at Crays Hill School



■ Solidarity – bishops Laurie Green and Thomas McMahon with grieving relatives of John Flynn at Dale Farm

'All of us get wiped with one brush' - grandmother

A TRAVELLER who has seven children and 22 grandchildren says her community must never be broken up.

Mary Ann McCarthy, 68, is seen as a grand matriarch of the Dale Farm site.

Speaking in a new electronic bulletin about the site, produced by students of the Human Rights Law Clinic at Essex University in Colchester, she said the eviction would traumatise her community, which she said relies on a network of support provided by an array of extended relatives.

She added: "All my family is here and to be split up from them would be a great loss."

"For eight years, it has been a nightmare for us."

"You get so stressed it makes you sick. We wait every day for the 28-day

eviction notice, but where are we going to go?"

She went on to say the occupants of the site are used to discrimination, adding: "All of us get wiped with one brush. If one person does something wrong, it gets blamed on all of us."

The bulletin also described how a human rights training workshop, also run by the students, at Dale Farm, nearly had to be called off after a marquee hire firm realised they were renting to travellers.

It said: "The Human Rights Clinic organisers experienced the discriminatory treatment towards travellers."

"The companies immediately backed out of their agreement."

"We only found one marquee company willing to service Dale Farm."